DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 384 104 EA 026 787

AUTHOR Brown, Genevieve; Irby, Beverly J.
TITLE The Preparation of Today's Educational Leaders: Inclusivity of Women.
PUB DATE Apr 95
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April 18-22, 1995). For a related document, see EA 026 786.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Education; *Educational Administration; Elementary Secondary Education; Females; Feminism; Leadership; Leadership Styles; *Leadership Training; Management Development; *Professional Development; *Women Administrators

ABSTRACT

If the challenges of the 21st century are to be met successfully, education must transform its orientation from one of exclusion to inclusion. To assist in the transformation of systems, to address specific barriers to inclusion, and to offer exemplary models in educational leadership, the Texas Council of Women School Executives sponsored a pilot course called "Women in Educational Leadership." The course combined the expertise of university and public school personnel for establishing formal and informal networks. Course components addressed communication skills, projection of professionalism, definitions and controversies of leadership, force-field analysis of obstacles, and maintenance of psychological and physical health in participatory formats. Participants designed professional portfolios, wrote and updated resumes, planned for improvement of professional images, practiced interview scenarios encompassing "difficult" questions, read current professional literature on women's issues, and engaged in research on women. Pre- and post-questionnaires indicate that participants felt the course addressed their issues of concern and aided in their personal transformation. Specifically, the students reported that they developed better networking systems, learned to balance their personal and professional lives, and learned from role models. It is recommended that administrator-education programs offer similar courses or integrate such experiences into existing coursework which could benefit both women and men. Contains 10 references. (LMI)

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The Preparation of Today's Educational Leaders: Inclusivity of Women

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Genevieve Brown, Ed.D.
Professor and
Chair, Educational Leadership and Counseling
Sam Houston State University
Huntsville, Texas 77341
409-294-1144
fax 409-294-1102

and

Beverly J. Irby, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor
Educational Curriculum and Instruction
Sam Houston State University
Huntsville, Texas 77341
409-294-1134
fax 409-294-0877

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA, April 21, 1995

EA026 787

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The Preparation of Today's Educational Leaders: Inclusivity of Women

If the challenges of the twenty-first century are to be successfully met, all systems, including education, must transform their orientation from exclusion to inclusion. An "exclusively oriented" system limits itself to special interest groups such as gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, language, intelligence type/style, religion, and/or political affiliation. An " inclusively oriented" system is one in which the knowledge and conditions conducive to quality and success are available to all individuals within the system. Many resources could be used in the transformation to an "inclusively oriented" system; we propose female leadership skills among those resources.

Certain female leadership skills are especially effective in bringing about systemic change. Women bring to the transformation of a system their ability to relate decisions to the larger effect upon a situation (Hegelsen, 1990), as well as scheduled sharing of information. Another important characteristic of the female leadership style is a desirable balance of product orientation and human concerns (Hegelson, 1990). Because women continue to face obstacles in securing leadership roles in the current "exclusively oriented" systems, widespread use of these female leadership skills is inhibited. Exclusive political power structures, lack of resources to obtain credentials and additional education, sexual prejudice, and family responsibilities all impede female leadership potential within conventional, hierarchical systems. Additional deterrents include: negative colleague interpretations of intelligence and assertiveness (Blackmore, 1989), higher qualification levels than those expected of male counterparts (Baccus, 1989), and the "...sometimes tragic...toll on one's personal life...exacted by success" (Holmes, 1989). Inadequate role models, networking, and mentor relationships also constitute important obstacles (Hegelsen, 1990; Holmes, 1989; Irby and Brown, 1994; Sandler, 1993).

A Model for Transforming the System

To assist in the transformation of systems, to address specific barriers, and to offer exemplary models in educational leadership, the Texas Council of Women School Executives sponsored a pilot course entitled "Women in Educational Leadership". Thematic presentations combined the expertise of university and public school personnel so that formal and informal networks could be established. Course components addressed the issues of communication skills, projection of professionalism, definitions and controversies of leadership, force field analysis of obstacles and maintenance of psychological and physical health in participatory formats. Participants designed

professional portfolios, formulated and updated resumes, strategically planned for improvement of professional images, practiced interviewing scenarios encompassing "difficult" questions, read current professional literature and trade books on women's issues, and engaged in research on women.

Reflections on the Model

Through pre-course questionnaires, women in the course corroborated the problems cited above in the needed transformation. Significant findings indicated the women enrolled in the course exhibited a lack of self confidence, naive perceptions regarding career advancement, misconceptions about networking and mentoring, and failure to network. Additionally the participants noted as inhibitors to their advancement: age (youth and maturity), lack of geographic mobility, ethnicity and incomplete knowledge of job expectations, district politics, having to be "Wonder Woman" in both workplace and home, and coping with established "good ole boy" mentalities and rules.

In the post-course evaluation, participants felt that the course addressed the issues surrounding the problems and aided in their own personal transformations. They found the role models, the sharing of strategies for career advancement, the mentoring, and the networking system developed during the course particularly beneficial. Written remarks included:

> "...the networking and mentoring system that I now have were started through this course. It will be invaluable in my career."
>
> "...this course reinforces support groups, women helping women, because that's who takes care of women..."
>
> "Our presenters were all wonderful role models. They willingly shared valuable experiences and insights and were inspirational and encouraging."
>
> "It is so good to see women succeed in meeting their career goals and advancing in the field of education. It makes me feel as if my personal goals are attainable."
>
> "In today's mobile society, one never knows where life takes a person... the suggestions and tips from this course are very helpful to me as I continue to develop my career in administration. The timeliness of these presentations is perfect..."

Such responses not only validate the effectiveness of the model, but they also indicate a significant change in personal confidence and an increased perception of the likelihood of personal goal attainment. The following feedback from three participants is indicative of responses of the entire group and confirms the appropriateness of the course and the applicability of the model in other settings.

Participant I.

"The course helped me to develop a better networking system."

The chance to network with and learn from other women administrators was both this participant's original registration motivation and her most beneficial result. Several fellow district administrators form her present network; they were unknown to her prior to the classes. Additionally, the course, for her, meaningfully explored the dilemmas of balancing a career and personal concerns. She received excellent ideas for conflict resolution. "If the informal setting and format is preserved, " she states, "I believe even non-educational organizations would benefit from this type course."

Participant 2.

"The class taught me how to balance my personal and professional life. I also learned personal marketing strategies."

The practical advice, motivating presenters, and career-related assignments were most significant to this participant. For this participant, the course helped in realistically planning for a position as principal in the future. Because family time is a major priority now, she plans to continue learning from professional journals, seminars, district personnel, and her newly developed network. She added "I wish we had been able to hear from the husbands of administrators." Such a comment merely hints at the kind of awareness and support system that could ease the way for women with both family priorities and career aspirations.

Other kinds of professional groups, according to her, could implement similar training prototypes so that "...good role models... confidence and success tips..." for a chosen field could be provided. This educational vehicle "...teaches about good leadership for all people..."

Participant 3.

"The role models the course provided were invaluable. We all bonded to motivate, network, and advance women..."

This participant claims her involvement in the course has had "fantastic" consequences on her professional and personal life. She now views her gender as "...a

challenge, not an obstacle," and she emphasizes the importance of collaboration, networking, and mentoring.

Direct involvement with the interviewing, career planning, resume and self-marketing sessions resulted in practical benefits. She envisions how the course could be effective in other settings:

> I think replication of this leadership course is very important, not only in educational settings but in business and industry as well. The course addressed concerns and issues that are important to all women not just women in education.

Conclusion and Implications

Because female leadership skills can contribute greatly to the transformation of systems from exclusion to inclusion, it is important that women have access to leadership positions that afford opportunities for utilization and role modeling of these skills. As we attempt to alter existing exclusively oriented systems, experiences such as those in the Women in Educational Leadership course offer great promise for the needed transformation. If such a course is not feasible, then the integration of such experiences into existing coursework in educational leadership could greatly benefit both women and men preparing to lead inclusive organizations.

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